

Charles Persecutes the Heretics.

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It was probably through Hoen that Zwingli developed sacramental views akin to those of Wessel. Wittenberg, however, attracted students from the Netherlands as from other countries, and ere long Luther's works were imported and printed, and sold by the thousand. Many of the Augustinian monks, notably those of Antwerp and Dordrecht, became his disciples, and zealously spread the new doctrines. The tide of reformation gathered strength as it flowed, and from Flanders to Friesland, from Holland to Cleves, the surge of the new religious life was felt in every town and hamlet. The spread of heresy is attested by the numerous edicts for its suppression. Even before the Diet of Worms, Charles had signalised his anti-Lutheran zeal by the publication of a placard forbidding the printing or reading of Lutheran books, and punishing delinquents by fine. After the Diet came the formal edict of condemnation, which denounced death and forfeiture of goods against heretics, and the appointment of inquisitors to put it in force. In 1523 two Augustinian monks of Antwerp were condemned to the flames and burned. These monks, Henry Voes and John Esch, were the first victims of the bigotry that made the Netherlands for the next fifty years a veritable shambles—the first of the fifty thousand victims whom the Prince of Orange reckoned, too liberally, however, to have suffered for the faith. Luther's Bible, translated into Dutch, multiplied the candidates for martyrdom, who emulated the early Christians in the joy with which they went to their cruel doom. Against this vernacular Bible the persecuting edicts rained in vain. A dozen of them, culminating in the monstrous deliverance of 1550, may be counted between the years 1521 and 1555, and some of them, which direct heretic women to be buried alive, really beat the record.

Charles was not obliged by political necessity to practise moderation in his hereditary dominions as in the empire. There were no Protestant electors and princes in the Netherlands to manipulate in his struggle with the Turk or the King of France, and the succession of barbarous edicts or placards bear witness alike to his autocratic will and his hatred of Lutheranism, which found in the Burgundian provinces the scope denied them in Germany. Their very frequency